

Does Homophobia Play a Role in HIV Transmission among Young MSM in Milwaukee?

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The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Acknowledgments

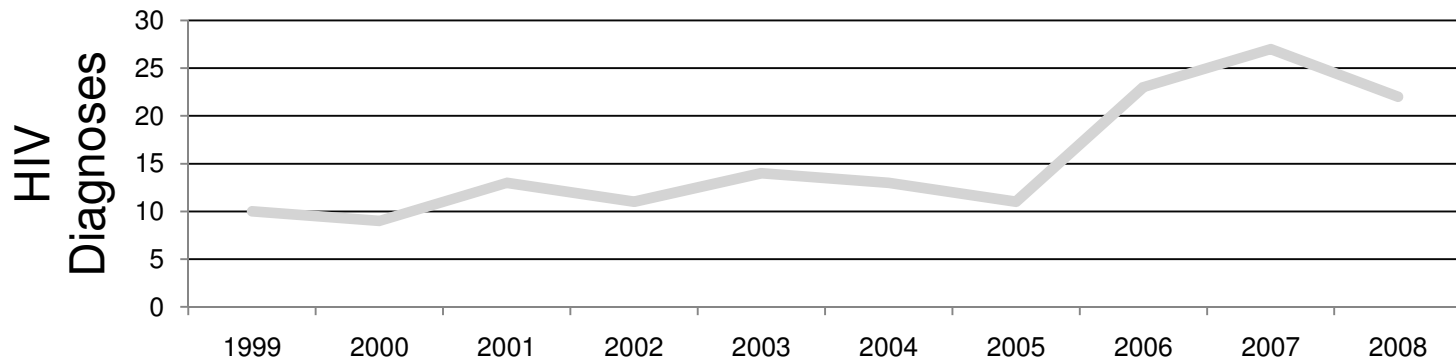
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 - Megan Corey
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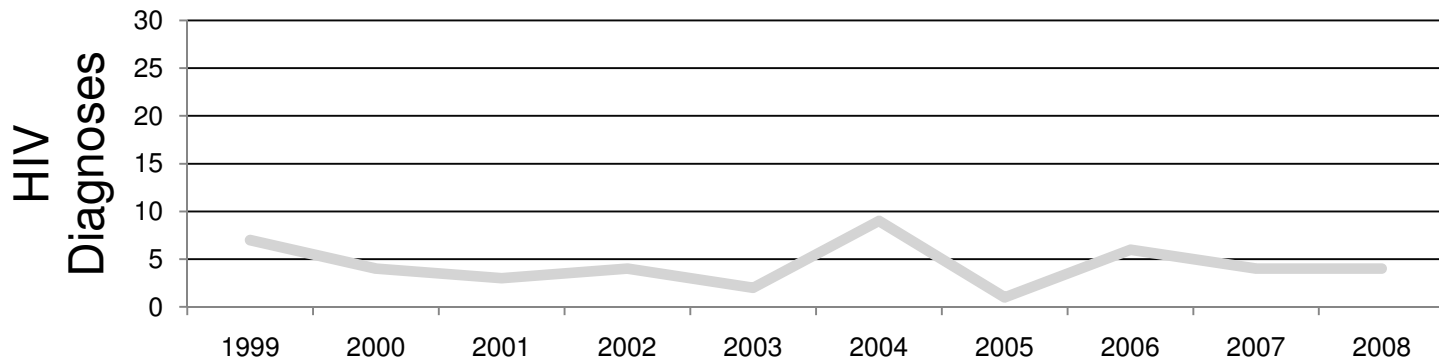
- Milwaukee LGBT Center
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HIV Trends among MSM Aged 15–29 Years, Milwaukee, 1999–2008

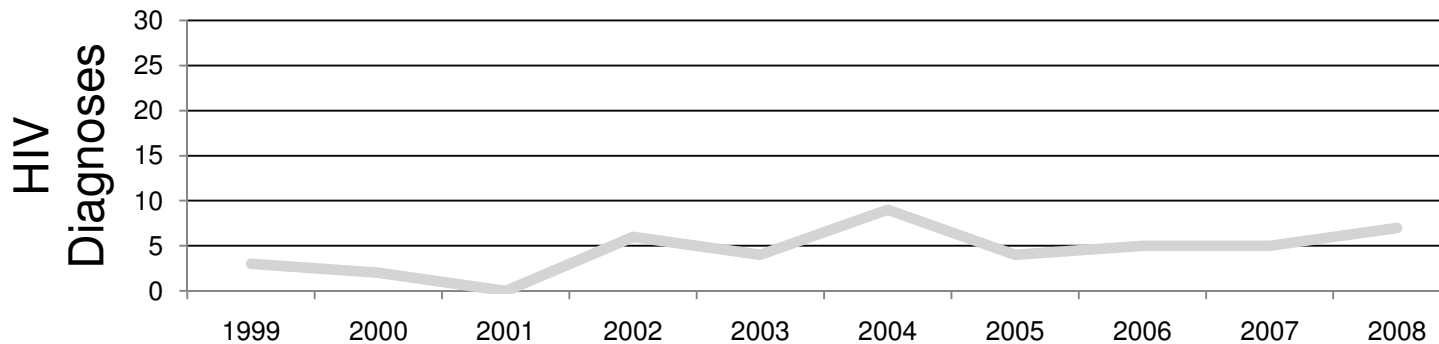
Black



White



Latino



Review of Investigation

- Structured interviews with 44 HIV-infected MSM aged 17-29 when diagnosed (29 black, 5 Latino, 9 white, 1 mixed race)
- Communicable disease specialists (Keenan Health Center) and case managers (AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin and 16th Street Clinic) recruited
- Data posted on AIDS/HIV Program website

Qualitative Methods

- Qualitative interviews with 28 of the 44 young MSM
- Two CDC scientists conducted interviews using a semi-structured interview guide
- Transcripts recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Two researchers independently examined transcripts to understand young men's statements (themes) regarding HIV transmission
- Established qualitative methodology to ensure agreement on themes

Qualitative Methods

- 18 interviews analyzed (from 14 black, 2 Latino, 2 white MSM)
- Supplemental questionnaire data from 44 young HIV-infected MSM who participated in structured interviews

Why Focus on Homophobia in Today's Presentation?

- Important area of intervention based upon structured interview data
- Prominent theme within participants' interviews
- Other important themes included:
 - Poverty
 - Institutionalized racism
 - Absent fathers and father figures
 - Sexual abuse
 - Recurrent trauma

Objective of Presentation

- Describe pathways through which homophobia may promote HIV transmission for young MSM in Milwaukee

Definition of Homophobia

- Negative perception or treatment directed toward individuals who are not heterosexual because of their sexual orientation
- Belief that sexual minorities (bisexuals, lesbians, gays) are inherently bad, immoral, or sinful
- Manifestations include
 - Disregard
 - Hostility
 - Institutionalized discrimination

The Emergence of Homophobia during Interviews

- We asked participants the following:
 - “What’s causing HIV to spread in Milwaukee?”
 - “What could’ve prevented you from becoming infected?”
 - “What is it like to be a young MSM in Milwaukee?”
- Men raised homophobia without being prompted
- Mention of themes related to homophobia only indicate when men felt the need to discuss it

General Thoughts on Homophobia

General Thoughts of MSM in Milwaukee about Homophobia

- Pervasive in Milwaukee
- Emanates from American society
- Connected with church-based messages
- Strict prohibitions against homosexuality
- 18/18 men mentioned homophobia as an important issue

HOMOPHOBIA

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graph TD; A[HOMOPHOBIA] --> B[Negative perceptions based on sexual orientation]; A --> C[Negative actions based on sexual orientation];
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Negative
perceptions
based on
sexual
orientation

Negative
actions
based on
sexual
orientation

Negative Perceptions of MSM

“Some people think that it’s a bad thing to do. Some people think it ain’t the godly way. So what I say is...[its] gonna bring a lotta shame, a lotta basically disappointment from the others.” (Black MSM, age 25 when diagnosed)

“It’s hard. It’s...this is not a place for open-mindedness at all. You know...” (Black MSM, age 27 when diagnosed)

Negative Actions toward MSM

- Personal or others' experiences of physical violence (12/18 men mentioned)
 - Gay bashing/physical assault
 - Murder
- Ridicule, disrespect, and harassment were also common (7/18 men mentioned)
 - Public name calling (e.g., “faggot”)
 - Source of gossip

Negative Actions toward MSM

“I was more scared of...just being shot or beat up because somebody found out I was gay...Kinda more scared of that...than I was of contracting anything.” (Black MSM, age 22 when diagnosed)

“They treated bad. I’ve seen people that are gay get disrespected on the bus...I’ve seen people get beat up. I’ve seen a gay dude get raped by straight men. They found out that he was gay ...and they raped ‘im.” (Black MSM, age 27 when diagnosed)

Housing Instability

Housing Instability

- Resulted when forced to leave home because of families not accepting their sexuality
- Shaped context of vulnerability to HIV:
 - Housing, money, and sex through relationships with older men
 - Demoralization
 - Substance use
- 4/18 men mentioned that housing instability resulted from homophobia

Housing Instability

“I’m thankful for my family...when you tell somebody you gay, a lot of times, I know a lot of young people who they get put out...you can either be there for him now or, you know, I don’t know. Lotta people turn they back on their kids so they don’t really have the... they don’t really have nobody, you know what I’m saying” (Black MSM, age 28 when diagnosed)

Consequence of Housing Instability: Risky Sexual Situations

“...I ended up house hopping. I ended up staying with a crowd of older gay men. And that’s kinda what promoted me to be sexually active a lot...Then I started smoking, started drinking around them, they would think, “Okay, well, you’re old enough, you’re mature enough,” and give me a drink. And most of them would do it just for the purpose of trying to lay down with me. [And how old were you when you got put out the house?]....fifteen. (Black MSM, age 22 when diagnosed)

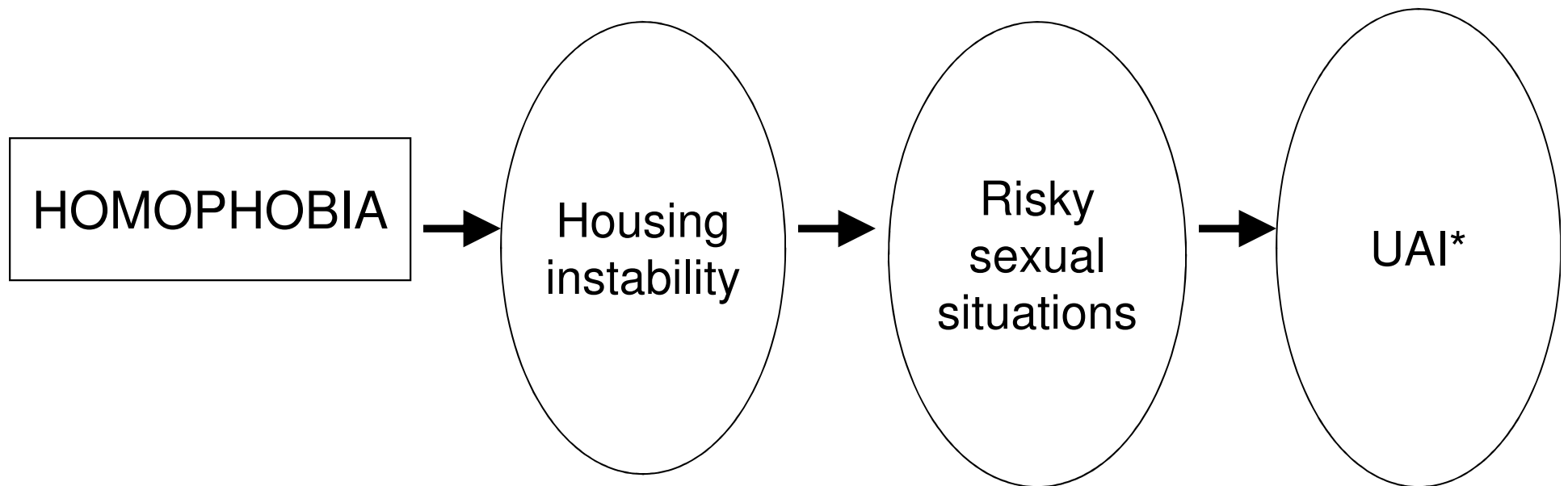
Consequence of Housing Instability: Risky Sexual Situations

“[What was your financial situation like during the times that you were prostituting yourself?] Not stable. It was from when I was fourteen to seventeen...my father had just put me out of the house. [Why did your father put you out of the house?] Because I came out of the closet. I told him I was gay.” (Black MSM, age 24 when diagnosed)

Housing Instability, Older Partners, and Exchange Sex

	Black (n=29)		Non-Black (n=15)	
	%		%	
Ever changed living situation because of family's reaction to sexual orientation (p=.10)	38		13	
First male sex partner > 5 years older	66		60	
Exchanged sex for money, housing, transportation, or drugs, year before diagnosis	24		20	

Housing Instability: Pathway from Homophobia to HIV Transmission



*UAI = unprotected anal intercourse

HIV Stigma

HIV Stigma

- Negative perceptions and actions directed toward HIV-infected individuals (14/18 men mentioned considerable stigma associated with HIV infection)
- Homophobia produces or enhances HIV stigma
 - God's punishment for being gay
 - Gay people deserve HIV
- Co-factor in HIV transmission
- 5/18 men mentioned how homophobia produces HIV stigma

HIV Stigma

“When I first told my mom I was gay, it was, ‘Well, you’re gonna get AIDS someday’ so it’s not like she didn’t expect [me to become infected].”
(White MSM, age 27 when diagnosed)

“And when my mother found out that I had a boyfriend apparently one of the first things she said [about me] is, ‘He’s going to get HIV and die.’” (White MSM, age 22 when diagnosed)

Consequence of HIV Stigma: Non-Disclosure of HIV Status

“Because then people look at you like a murderer or you get stoned. You know? So it’s like, I think the way society takes it, makes it worse than what it’s supposed to be or what it really is and then people fear it...What people don’t understand they fear. And what they fear, they hate. And that’s where it...it makes people who are positive scared to speak. People who are not [positive], scared to ask...

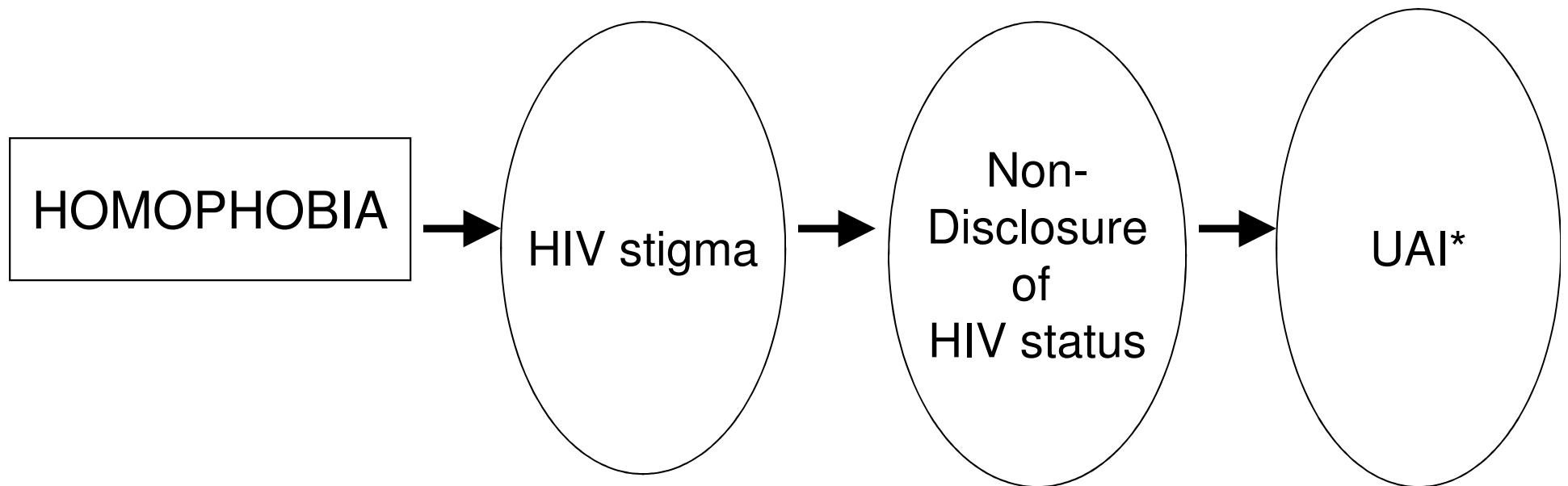
Consequence of HIV Stigma: Non-Disclosure of HIV Status

...Nobody wants to say anything. And [on] our end we're scared, you know? They might ship us off into a quarantine area, you know...They treat us more like the disease than a person. And, other people who are not [positive], like I said, just don't know. I mean, they're scared. They don't ask questions because probably don't wanna offend anyone..." (Black MSM, age 22 when diagnosed)

Disclosure of HIV Status to Casual Sex Partners

	Black (n=29)	Non-Black (n=15)
	%	%
Disclosure of HIV status to ≥ 1 casual male sex partner (p=.04)	38	77

HIV Stigma: Pathway from Homophobia to HIV Transmission



*UAI = unprotected anal intercourse

Code of Silence / Lack of Sex Education

Code of Silence / Lack of Sex Education

- Lack of open dialogue about same-gender sexuality and HIV because “homosexuality is wrong” (13/18 men mentioned code of silence)
- No discussions of same-gender relationships and sexuality in school and in family settings (all 18 men mentioned lack of sex education)
- Focus on heterosexual partnering because of an underlying assumption that all youth are heterosexual
- 7/18 men provided overlapping narratives on these two themes

Code of Silence / Lack of Sex Education

“They talked about using condoms. They didn’t really talk about HIV ‘cause they, you know, people think HIV is mostly with gay men, not heterosexual people...they talked a little bit about it but they didn’t get into details...They’d talk more about health. But not about diseases. [Did they talk about men having sex with men?] No. Not at all.” (Latino MSM, age 19 when diagnosed)

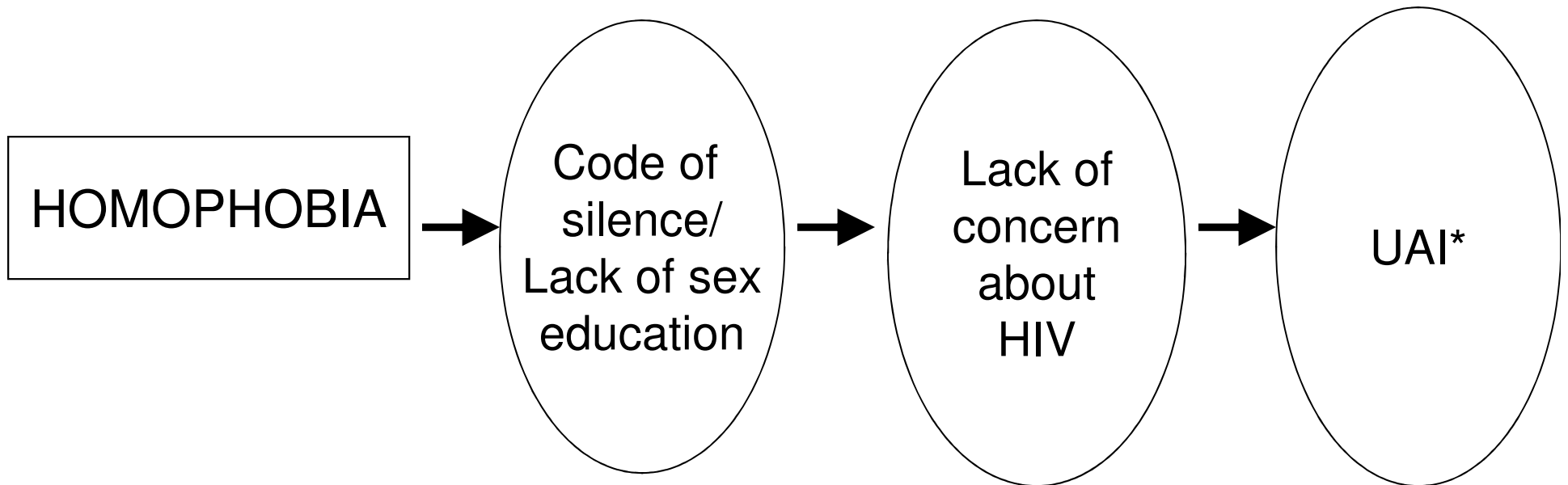
Code of Silence / Lack of Sex Education

“Probably being talked to about [my sexuality] more when I was a youth, like, having somebody come into the schools and talk about it. Like, that really wasn’t something that was really talked about at school. Nor in my family whatsoever.”
(Black MSM, age 23 when diagnosed)

Consequence of the Code of Silence / Lack of Sex Education: Lack of Concern about HIV

“...people don’t place it as great of a risk as they did before. So I think people aren’t talking about it and they’re not thinking about it as much as they should be.” (White MSM, age 22 when diagnosed)

Code of Silence / Lack of Sex Education: Pathway from Homophobia to HIV Transmission



*UAI = unprotected anal intercourse

Internalized Homophobia

Internalized Homophobia

- MSM embrace negative views about gay and bisexual men (13/18 men mentioned)
- Religion and spirituality were strongly connected with internalized homophobia, particularly for black MSM
 - “Homosexuality is a sin”
 - Need to “repent”
- 9/18 men provided overlapping narratives on internalized and external homophobia

Internalized Homophobia

“I don’t think [abstinence] woulda been easy ‘cause I’ve always felt like...if I die tomorrow I’m going to Hell. You know what I’m saying, just because I think to be gay is a sin.” (Black MSM, age 28 when diagnosed)

“Then you have other ministers or pastors after they slept with you they feel they was wrong...they try to change you.” (Black MSM, age 24 when diagnosed)

Consequence of Internalized Homophobia: Maladaptive Coping

“I never had sex with a man sober. It always was ‘cause I was, you know, drunk or [under] the influence of weed, maybe cocaine, alcohol...because it’s forbidden for me to have sex with a man. [What makes you say it’s forbidden? Is it wrong?] Yeah. In the culture I grew up in...hell yeah, it was forbidden, you do not do that, no, it’s wrong, yeah, that’s not cool...”
(Latino MSM, age 22 when diagnosed)

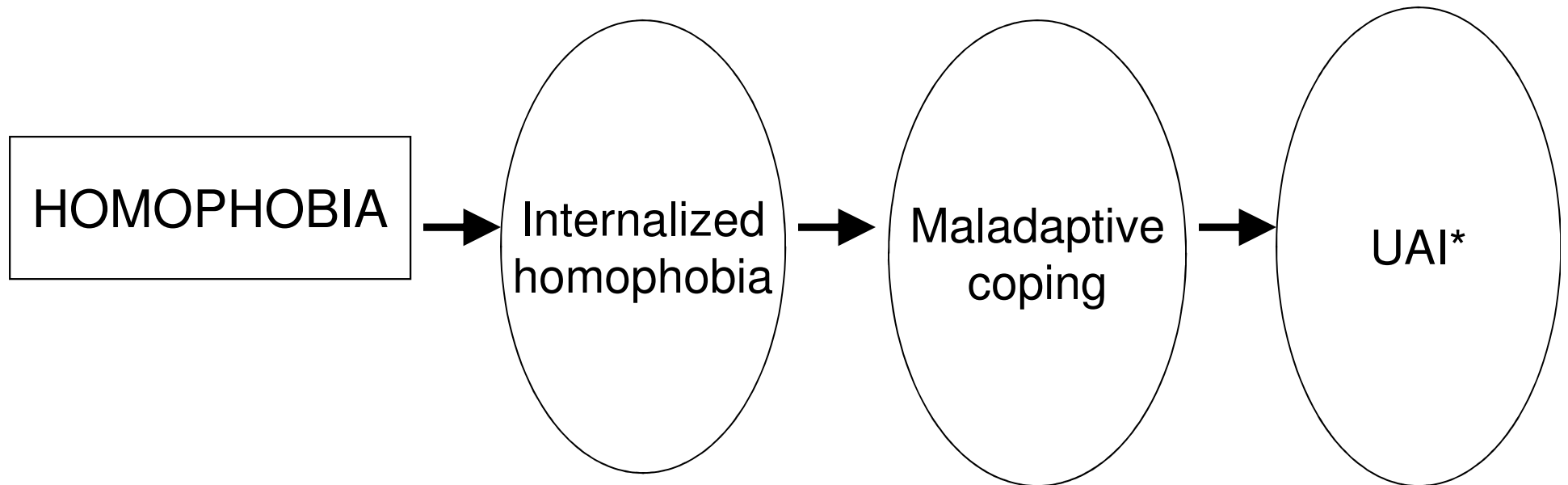
Consequence of Internalized Homophobia: Maladaptive Coping

“Well, if you can’t admit to yourself that you’re gay, how are you gonna ask your partner if they’re HIV positive?...if you...don’t wanna admit it fully, how are you gonna have a conversation with who you’re having sex with about that kind of stuff [HIV]? You’re trying to get it done. Usually those people are the kind of people that as soon as they are finished they’re all weird and they go, ‘I gotta get out of there.’” (White, age 27 when diagnosed)

Internalized Homophobia among Young MSM with HIV

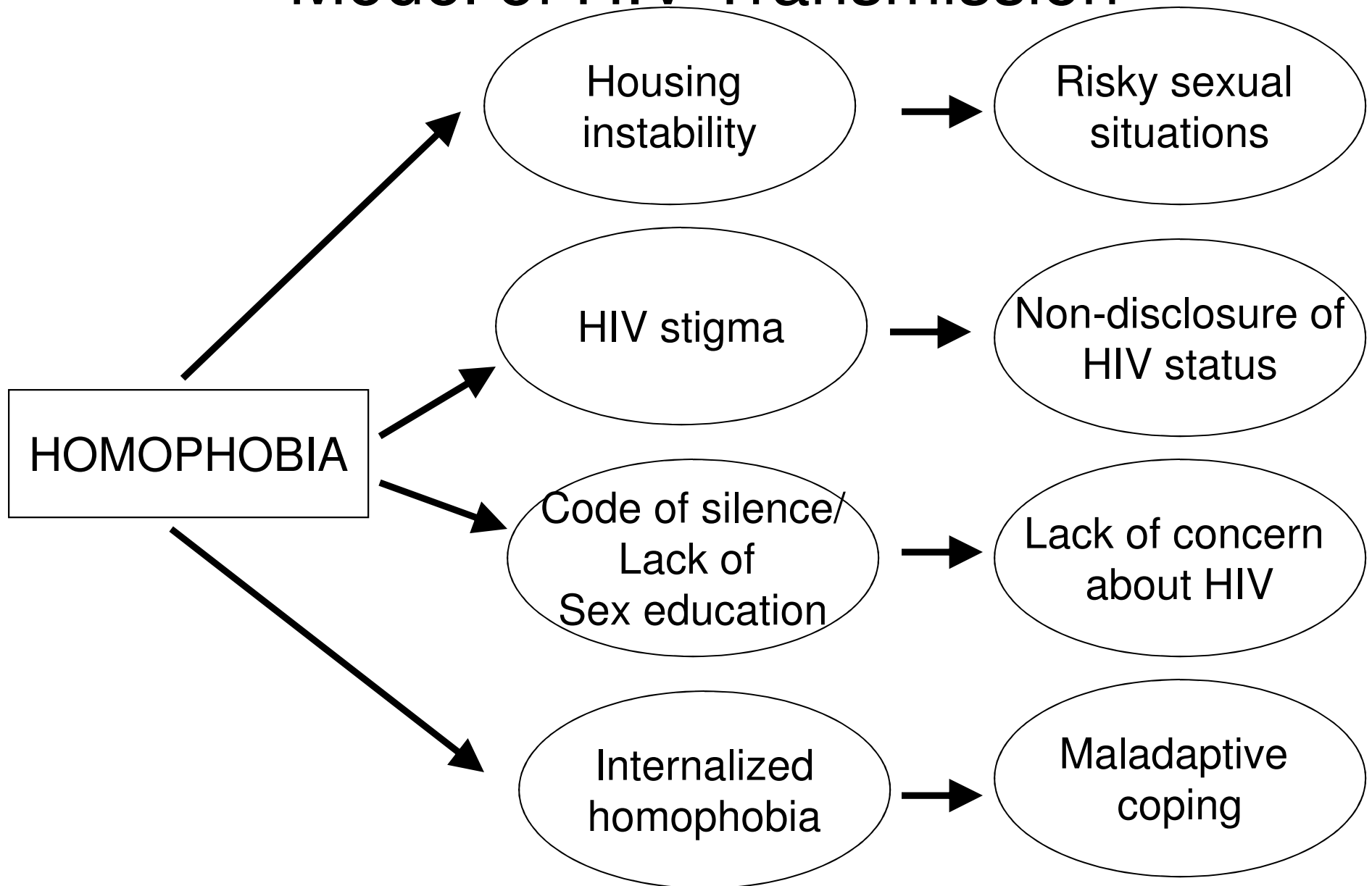
	Black (n=29)	Non-Black (n=15)
	%	%
Believe sex between two men is a sin (p=.08)	46	20
Wish you weren't attracted to men (p=.04)	59	27
Think your sexuality has hurt or embarrassed your family (p=.07)	62	33

Internalized Homophobia: Pathway from Homophobia to HIV Transmission

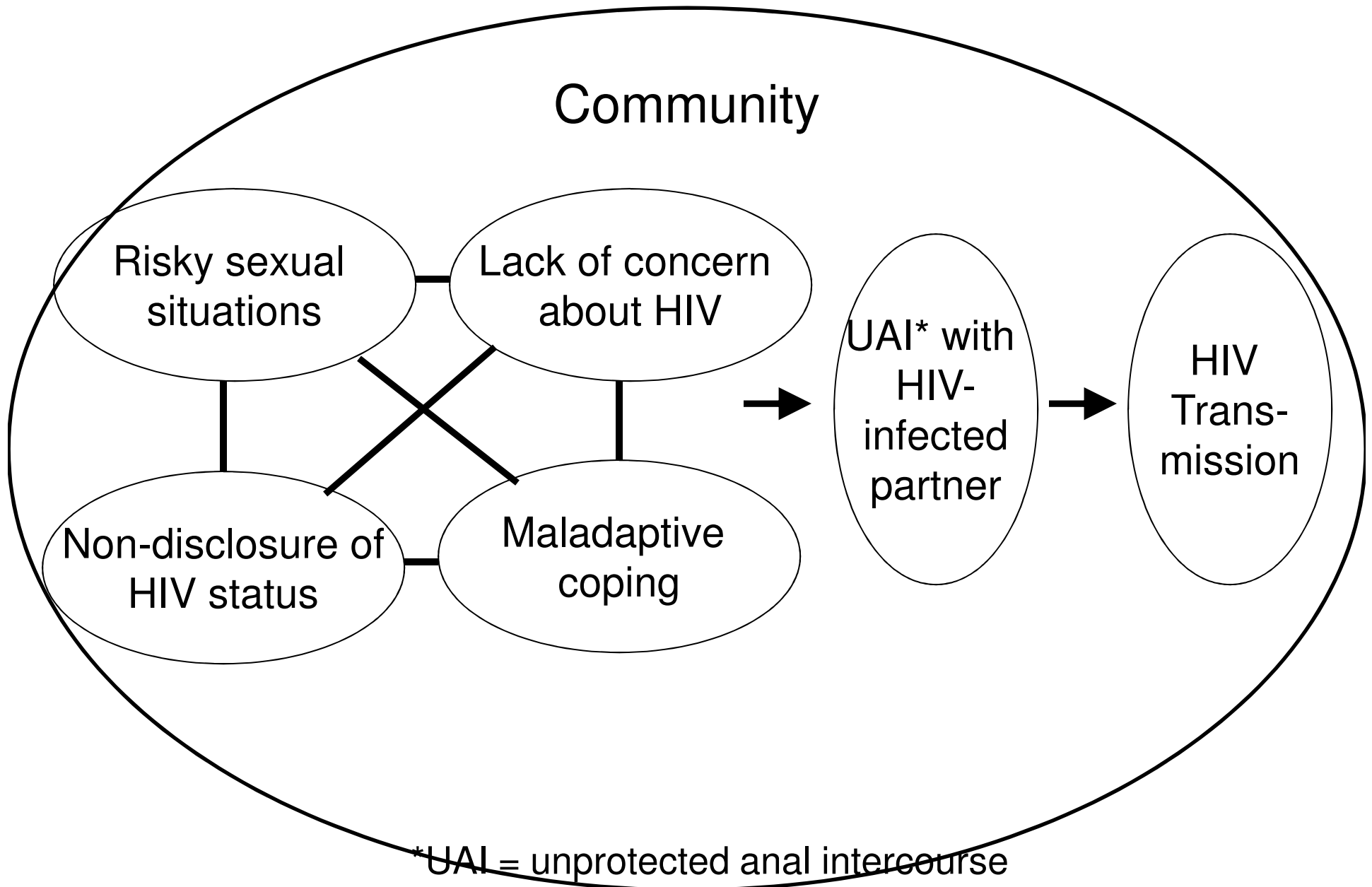


*UAI = unprotected anal intercourse

Model of HIV Transmission



Model of HIV Transmission



Other Potential Pathways to HIV Transmission

- Low participation in HIV prevention activities
- Stress, unprotected anal intercourse to deal with stress
- Internalized homophobia is associated with unprotected anal intercourse through adverse mental health outcomes
 - Demoralization
 - Low self-esteem
 - Guilt

Limitations

- Only HIV-infected MSM interviewed
- Overrepresentation of men receiving HIV medical care
- Findings not generalizable to all young MSM in Milwaukee or other cities
- Other potential pathways from homophobia to HIV transmission

Conclusions

- Homophobia was a social determinant contributing to behaviors that promote HIV transmission
- Mechanisms (e.g., lack of sex education) are consistent with factors scientists believe are promoting HIV transmission among MSM as a whole
- HIV prevention interventions must be designed and implemented to reduce homophobia and its consequences in order to reduce HIV incidence among young MSM

Addressing Homophobia in Milwaukee

- Provide comprehensive sexuality education in public schools
- Initiate social marketing campaigns to promote positive dialogue in families and churches
- Work with local pastors and churches
 - Begin with ministers who may not be vocal
 - Use a public forum so young men can share their stories
- Promote acceptance of young bisexual and gay men

What can be done to address homophobia?

Discussion/Questions

Contact Information

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